

PUBLIC HEARING OF THE
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT'S VEGETATION TREATMENTS
AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
AND PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

Tuesday, December, 13, 2005

General Scott Room
Embassy Row Courtyard By Marriott
1600 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

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P R O C E E D I N G S

Time Noted: 2:12 p.m.

MS. RAMOS: Well, let's go ahead and get started, and welcome. This is the BLM's Vegetation Treatments and Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Environmental Report public hearing.

And basically the purpose of the hearing is just to help the public understand what BLM is doing and our proposal to treat up to 6 million acres annually in the western U.S. and Alaska, explain the role of the Programmatic EIS and the Programmatic Environmental Report and solicit comments from the public on issues or concern that they may believe that should be addressed in the final EIS and final Environmental Report.

BLM was founded in 1946 to serve current and future publics to restore and maintain the help of the land. Basically as you can see, BLM manages over 262 million acres of public lands primarily in the western United States and Alaska and over 700 million acres of subsurface minerals. A bulk of the land, again, is in the western United States. And

1 Alaska alone has 81 million acres.

2 So BLM is proposing to treat on up to 6
3 million acres annually in the western U.S. and Alaska
4 using primary treatment methods.

5 To reduce hazardous fuel load and to reduce
6 the risk of wildfires, this is in response to the
7 National Fire Plan and the National Cohesive Strategy
8 Plan. We plan on removing and controlling weeds.

9 Currently BLM has 35 million acres of
10 public lands are infested with noxious and invasive
11 waste. And we also plan on restoring and
12 rehabilitating damaged lands, especially those
13 damaged by wildfire.

14 BLM averages about 1.7 million acres
15 annually of ESR lands or ESR projects which is
16 Emergency Stabilization and Restoration. And these
17 are follow-up to fire.

18 And also other projects would include
19 improving ecosystem health, improving water quality
20 and projects that would improve fish and wildlife
21 habitat.

22 So the treatment methods that BLM employs

1 for these projects include mechanical. And these
2 slides are in the order of importance for the Bureau
3 of Land Management. BLM uses mechanical methods such
4 as mowing tractors and has been bushhogs.

5 Prescribed fire is a second use of
6 vegetation methods. Prescribed fire is used for a
7 number of projects such as reducing the fuel lobe and
8 also as part of other management restrictions.

9 Chemical uses are third most often used
10 treatment method. Currently BLM treats about 300,000
11 acres annually using chemicals.

12 And biological control employs the use of
13 insects, pathogens, and domestic livestock to control
14 the managed vegetation.

15 Manual method is probably our least often
16 used method. But those include using hand-held
17 equipment, chain saws, even grubbing, hand-grubbing
18 and hand-pulling. A lot of these methods are usually
19 used in areas where other methods cannot be used,
20 such as critical areas of concern or where it's too
21 close to the public in wildland or interface areas
22 and the safest method to use is manual.

1 So besides treating vegetation, what else
2 is BLM proposing to do with this EIS?

3 Well, basically BLM is updating and
4 evaluating its current and future use of herbicides.
5 And we are evaluating a risk to humans and to plants
6 and animals from using new herbicides. And we're
7 also proposing to add four new herbicides to BLM's
8 list.

9 We currently have 20 herbicides that are
10 approved for use of public lands. And the four new
11 herbicides that we're proposing to use are
12 diflufenzopyr, diquat, fluridone, and imazapic.
13 Well, diquat and fluridone are primarily aquatic
14 herbicides.

15 In addition, BLM is developing a protocol
16 to evaluate the risks associated with using
17 herbicides that meet and also a protocol that will be
18 used if BLM chooses to add herbicides in the future
19 and to evaluate current herbicides that we have on
20 our current list.

21 This protocol was done in conjunction and
22 coordination with the EPA Fish and Wildlife Service

1 and NOAA Fisheries. And a bulk of our time was
2 actually spent developing the protocol and then going
3 on and developing the risk assessments. If this
4 protocol is used in the future, we would use the
5 protocol along with NEPA assessments to allow the use
6 of new herbicides in the future.

7 So the role of the programmatic EIS as --
8 federal agencies are required under the National
9 Environmental Policy Act to prepare an EIS if an
10 action has a potential for significant environmental
11 impact. And during scoping, the use of herbicides
12 was identified as a significant impact. Also the use
13 of herbicides was central as part of the other four
14 EISs that BLM has completed.

15 So what BLM is doing is analyzing the
16 effects on the natural and social resources of the
17 herbicides currently available to BLM. We are
18 analyzing the impacts of the four herbicides proposed
19 for use by the BLM.

20 In addition, BLM has used risk assessments
21 developed by the forest service and evaluated those
22 risk assessments to our protocol. And we are taking

1 those forward. But in addition to that, we found
2 that there are at least six herbicides that are on
3 our current list that are not on the forest service
4 list. So BLM went back and developed new herbicides,
5 new human health and ecological risk assessments for
6 those herbicides. They include tebuthiuron, diuron,
7 bromacil, and chlorsulfuron.

8 BLM also went back and completed a risk
9 assessment on sulpho meturon methyl because of our
10 concerns with the risk associated with that
11 herbicide.

12 So basically the alternatives considered in
13 the Proposed Environmental Impact Statements include
14 Alternative A, which is continue the present use of
15 herbicide use and basically the no action
16 alternative.

17 However, under this alternative, BLM would
18 continue to conduct herbicide treatments on about
19 300,000 acres annually. And of our current 20
20 herbicides that are approved for use on BLM lands, we
21 would actually not carry two forward. Atracine and
22 fosamine are two herbicides that BLM chose not to

1 carry forward because we did not complete risk
2 assessments on them and because their use has been
3 very low to nonexistent in the last few years.

4 However, in the case where BLM needs to use either
5 atracine or fosamine in the future, BLM would develop
6 new risk assessments to include those two herbicides
7 on our good list.

8 Alternative B is to expand the use and
9 allow for the use of the new herbicides in 17 western
10 states. This is our preferred alternative. This
11 would allow the use of the current approved
12 herbicides minus the atracine and fosamine and add
13 the four new herbicides onto a list.

14 In addition, there are six other herbicides
15 currently on the BLM list that BLM will probably not
16 be using because, again, their use has been
17 nonexistent in the last few years.

18 Alternative C is the no herbicide
19 alternative. Basically BLM is analyzing what the
20 effects would be if we use no herbicides at all on
21 the public lands.

22 Alternative D was identified by the public

1 as having some concerns on aerial spraying. This is
2 a no aerial spraying of herbicides even by big
3 streaming aircraft or by helicopters. There are some
4 concerns over some incidences on off-site drift.

5 And Alternative E is the no use of
6 acetolactate synthase-inhibiting herbicides. And
7 this alternative was submitted to the Bureau of Land
8 Management by a coalition of environmentalists. In
9 addition to identifying these herbicides, it also
10 included using more passive restoration methods for
11 the bureau.

12 Under this alternative four herbicides that
13 are currently on BLM's list; chlorsulfuron, imazapyr,
14 mensulfur methyl and sulpho meturon methyl would not
15 be used, and imazapic which is one on BLM's proposed
16 list of new herbicides would not be used either.

17 So hasn't BLM been treating vegetations for
18 years and what is new?

19 Well, BLM prepared EISS in the late 1980s
20 and early 1990s to evaluate vegetation treatments in
21 the western U.S.

22 In addition at that time, BLM was under a

1 court injunction of no herbicide use. And to respond
2 to that court injunction, BLM developed risk
3 assessments to address the NEPA issues. And all of
4 the four updated EISs include risk assessments. But
5 at that time, those risk assessments only included
6 human health effects.

7 So as you can see, the 13 western states is
8 a programmatic EIS. You have one from western
9 Oregon; another one from the Northwest that will
10 remain included, and California vegetation
11 treatments.

12 Now under these four EISs, BLM is only
13 authorized to treat two million acres annually under
14 the EISs and related NEPA for fire rehabilitation and
15 restoration. These EISs did not include Alaska,
16 Nebraska or Texas. Nor did it include an avenue or a
17 protocol to add new herbicides in the future.

18 The role of the Programmatic Environmental
19 Report is a little different. And this is something
20 that is new to the Bureau of Land Management. The
21 Environmental Report discloses the general impact of
22 non-herbicide treatment methods. BLM is not making

1 any decision on non-herbicide treatment methods. But
2 we did want to provide updated information for
3 non-herbicide treatment methods, such as biological
4 control, mechanical and prescribed fire and manual
5 methods.

6 This information was also needed to assess
7 cumulative impacts of all of the treatments. And
8 cumulative impact includes the past, present, and
9 reasonably foreseeable future of all of the
10 treatments combined.

11 In addition, BLM is consulting with NOAA
12 Fisheries and Fish and Wildlife Service and pursuant
13 to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. So this
14 information was needed by both the Fish and Wildlife
15 Service and NOAA Fisheries to assess the affects to
16 present endangered species.

17 So the importance of each of the treatment
18 method under the preferred alternative is really --
19 percentage wise does not change. However, we are
20 going from 2 million acres to 6 million acres. So
21 acre-wise, we will be seeing an increase.

22 The two methods that we'll see qualities

1 that most increase will be mechanical and prescribed
2 fire. But we actually see a decrease in both manual
3 and biological control.

4 Overall, though, chemical treatments remain
5 steady at about 16 percent. Again, keep in mind
6 we're going from 2 million acres to 6 million acres.
7 So the actual number of acres may increase.

8 So where do we go from here?

9 Well, this is the 9th hearing of 10 total
10 hearings that are being held. BLM has held hearings
11 in Portland, Oregon; Sacramento, California; Salt
12 Lake City, Utah; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Grand
13 Junction, Colorado; Boise, Idaho; Billings, Montana;
14 and Cheyenne, Wyoming.

15 We are concluding with the meeting, the
16 public hearing here in Washington, D.C. And another
17 hearing will be held this evening in Las Vegas,
18 Nebraska.

19 Our scoping meetings begin in January
20 through March of 2002. And between that time, again,
21 as I stated before, BLM was working on pulling all of
22 the information together, developing the protocol

1 with the EPA and services as well as developing the
2 risk assessments.

3 The draft of the EIS was available
4 November 11th of 2005, and the public comment hearing
5 period is ongoing. The public hearings are being
6 held from November through December.

7 And the final EIS will be available in the
8 late spring of 2006. And public review for the final
9 will be held in the early summer 2006. We are hoping
10 to implement a record of decision by the summer of
11 2006.

12 So what can you do to help?

13 You can review the documents. We have CDs
14 available in the back. The EIS and Environmental
15 Report are posted on BLM's web site. And there are
16 copies at local BLM offices.

17 We invite the public to provide your
18 comments at issues you feel need to be addressed in
19 the proposed EIS and Environmental Report. And let
20 BLM know if there are any alternatives to treating
21 vegetation other than what is proposed by the BLM.

22 Also if you would like to be on the mailing

1 list or receive a hard copy of the document, feel
2 free to fill out a comment sheet and we will mail one
3 to you.

4 This is the address where you can send in
5 your comments. Written comments can be mailed to
6 Brian Amme, the Vegetation EIS Project Manager at
7 BLM, P.O. Box 12000, Reno, Nevada 89520-0006.

8 Or comments can be faxed to Brian at
9 775-861-6712. BLM is also accepting email comments.
10 And they can be addressed to vegeis@nv.blm.gov. The
11 public comment period will close on January 9, 2006.

12 At this point, I will go ahead and turn the
13 hearing over to Bud Cribley, our Hearings Officer.

14 MR. CRIBLEY: Good afternoon. I'd like to
15 thank everybody for coming to this meeting this
16 afternoon. And I guess I would like to go ahead and
17 start the formal portion of tonight's or this
18 afternoon's meeting in the formal hearing process.

19 As Gina stated, my name is Bud Cribley, and
20 I'll be the hearings officer for this afternoon's
21 hearing. The hearing is being held for the purpose
22 of providing you an opportunity to make oral comments

1 on the Bureau of Land Management's Draft Programmatic
2 Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental
3 Report of Vegetation Treatments on Public Lands
4 administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the
5 17 western United States including Alaska.

6 Unlike an open house, this is a formal
7 hearing. And as such, we will not be entertaining
8 questions during the hearing process.

9 We have not had anybody register or sign up
10 prior to this time to provide any oral comments for
11 us this afternoon. I'll make one last offer. If
12 there is anybody who would like to make comments, if
13 you could identify yourself, we will provide you that
14 opportunity.

15 There's nobody in the audience that
16 indicates an interest in providing oral comments
17 today. And based on that, we will go ahead and close
18 the formal hearing.

19 I thank everybody for coming in and
20 listening to the presentation. And the hearing is
21 closed. Thank you very much.

22 (At 2:30 p.m., the hearing concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

I, Delores M. Green, do hereby certify that the foregoing proceedings were taken by me in stenotype and thereafter reduced to typewriting under my supervision; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and further, that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.

Delores M. Green
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Court Reporter